

Hold up by Onki

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Summary:

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No, sending him into cold, slimy tunnels with bunch of kids to look after wasn't enough. Making him deal with demidogs or whatever Dustin and his gang calls them isn't enough. Even getting his ass kicked by Billy wasn't enough.

Steve blinked again, looking at his reflection in unfamiliar bedroom.

Face of one and only Billy fucking Hargrove was staring back at him.

1. Chapter 1

The universe seemed to *love* fucking with Steve's life.

No, sending him into cold, slimy tunnels with bunch of kids to look after wasn't enough. Making him deal with *demidogs* or whatever Dustin and his gang calls them isn't enough. Even getting his ass kicked by Billy wasn't enough.

Steve blinked again, looking at his reflection in unfamiliar bedroom.

Face of one and only *Billy* fucking *Hargrove* was staring back at him.

"Shit!" Steve couldn't help the curse that flew out of him. He pawed the face, slapping himself twice for good measure, just to be sure he wasn't dreaming about this. But sadly, it was the reality he woke up in.

When he stumbled out of his room ten minutes later, hair be damned, he saw Max sitting by the kitchen counter, nibbling on a toast. She looked up warily, putting down the comic book she was reading.

"Hey", Steve intelligently provided, giving a small smile.

Max only looked at him, as if he'd grown another head – maybe two. Remembering he wasn't *Steve*, but *Billy*, he cleared his throat, looking around for the car keys, only to remember he already had them in his jeans pocket. Switching bodies with an asshole didn't excuse him from making Max skip on school or being late.

Thinking of school, he was supposed to pick up Dustin on his way! Glancing at the clock on top of the TV he had roughly fifteen minutes to get there. Who knew where the hell Billy lived, so now he had to drive around like a lunatic, also looking like he knew what he was doing, while trying to figure out where the hell he was.

"C'mon let's get moving", he threw over his shoulder at Max.

"But we have time. Aren't you gonna", she swirled her hand at her head, while looking at his hair.

“Max, no *time*”, Steve ushered her outside, stuffing her comic book into her backpack, pushing her out.

“Don’t touch me!” she all but struggled, when Steve shoved her into the car. He felt a little bit guilty for it, before starting the engine and driving out to the main road.

He did few useless circles to figure out where he was. Being Hawkins born and bred, he quickly pinpointed his exact location, speeding away to Henderson’s house as soon as he did so.

When he pulled by the driveway, he saw Dustin bidding his goodbyes to his mom, running out, only to stop dead in his tracks, when he saw Steve.

Steve could see Dustin visibly gulping and taking a deep breath, before he started blabbering on, “Hey, man, I know we left you on the floor, but c’mon don’t kill me for it, *please*. I’ve got whole life before me, I mean I would’ve helped you, but I just didn’t have time-“

“Dustin”, when the younger boy continued on with his ramblings, Steve gave more stern ‘*Dustin*’, which immediately shut him up.

“Get in the car”, he could see Dustin hesitating, so he pushed on, “You better do it fast.”

When Dustin saw Max sitting in the backseat, he clearly sagged in relief, taking seat beside her.

Steve didn’t want to be harsh with the kids, but he had a reputation for Billy to keep up for. Since when he cared for it at all, though? Perhaps if he wanted same to be done for him, he could at least try for Billy as well. Even if the dick-bag didn’t deserve tenth of it.

Saying ride to the Hawkins Middle School was awkward would be an understatement of the century. Everyone in the car seemed to want to be *anywhere* but there, all looking out the window. Steve could hear whispers between Dustin and Max, which stopped as soon as he looked up at them through the rear mirror. They gladly stumbled out of the car when Steve stopped by the front doors of the school.

They had AV club today. which was good - more time for Steve and

Billy to work out whatever that has happened in-between them.

Fingers twitching from the frayed nerves, that have suffered through enough already, he patted down the jacket to find cheap crumpled up pack of cigarettes – for which he was immensely grateful for. Quickly lighting up one of the fags, he tried to finish it up before he reached the school grounds.

When he pulled up at the high school's parking lot, he looked around for his BMW. And Steve was ready to jump up in joy, when he spotted the car, with himself leaning against it. Only to feel the anger build up when he saw the state his hair was in.

2. Chapter 2

At least Billy didn't seem to be as dense as he looked. When Steve jerked his head towards the school building, Billy followed him without any questions, until they reached the bathroom. Billy was the one who checked all the stalls for people.

The bell rung, but Steve couldn't bring himself to care about History class, when he had a bigger problem, that stood in front of him now with a too low cut t-shirt he usually wore at home.

"What are you wearing?" Steve snapped pulling at the loose gray shirt on Billy, on *himself*. He didn't even know how to address that.

"Could ask you the same, pretty boy. Don't worry about your own appearance, black eye eclipses everything else", Billy pointed at his – Steven's face, still battered from the dreadful night few days ago. The cuts were closed off, but the yellow and green bruises still remained. Steve usually covered them with his mother's foundation, but of course Billy had to come to school, showing everyone his fucked up face.

If Steve wasn't sure whether Billy was inside of him – oh god it sounded wrong, *now*, he was absolutely sure they've swapped bodies. Although the familiar nickname was more confusing whether Billy addressed himself that way or Steve. His head hurt just from thinking about it.

"Okay. Alright", Steve tried to reason, pacing around, shoes squeaking against the linoleum floor, "I'm you, and you're me."

"We have an Einstein here. Call the nerds", Billy didn't seem to be even fazed, calmly leaning against the sink, giving him a slow clap.

"Billy, if you hadn't noticed we're in a messed up situation here!" he loomed over his own body. Noticing only now how his eyes were too soft, when Billy looked up. Steve almost wondered how he managed to be the 'King' of the school.

"Well, I woke up in a mansion. Got better a car. Only downside being

in your body, but if face heals up, I'm not even gonna complain 'bout that. You're not half bad looking, weak – but that's doable", Billy all but listed with nonchalance, giving a wink at the end.

Steve mustered all of his willpower not to choke the boy right then and there, talking deep breaths to calm himself. A trick he learned from one of his visits to the therapist a year ago.

"Alright. Maybe we can reverse this. Like in Freaky Friday! That's it, we should try to remember what we did yesterday", Steve walked in circles again, trying to recollect his memories from the day before.

When he couldn't find anything out of ordinary, he looked up at Billy, who only shrugged.

"I fucked a girl, drove around, went home and fell asleep – my usual day."

"Listen, I'm not trying to out-macho you here, we're trying to fix *whatever* this is. Faster – better. So, stop lying and tell me what you did."

"Alright, fine. But you have to stop wearing that first", Billy waved with a flick of his wrist, "Also the hair."

"Same for you as well", it was downright painful to see what he was wearing. Billy probably felt the same, their styles being polar opposites of each other.

"I found some Faberge stuff in your bathroom by the way", Steve closed his eyes at that. And to think that was his most closely guarded secret.

"Just tell me you used the spray on the damp hair", obviously he didn't, as he saw his usually fluffy hair was just a sad soggy mess. He probably didn't live up to Billy's standards as well: the other boy eyed him up from head to toes, face pinching up in distaste.

"What are we gonna do?" is all Steve could come up with.

"Stop whining, Jesus. Every since you came up to me, all you did was whine like a little bitch. How about you shut up?" after few moments

of silence, Billy added with a half-assed anger, “We’ll think of something.”

They didn’t really come up with anything. All they agreed upon was to act as natural as one can be. Minimum contact with people, telling others would just bring over unnecessary attention. And the appearance. They both gave each other a detailed list of their usual morning routine. Steve could respect that, if Billy made effort to make him look half-decent, he will as well.

“You’ll have to pick up Dustin from home. Also on Saturdays, they got D&D rematch”, Steve mentioned. He’ll probably have to drive around Max as well.

“Yeah, do that with Max as well. She’s with your nerds all the time anyways”, Steve didn’t even try to correct Billy on the ‘your’ remark: because he did feel like the nerd club were under his wing. Now he sounded like a mother hen.

“Just-“, Billy started, face becoming unreadable, “Be polite with Dad. I mean, my dad. Stick with curfew for Max.”

“Uh, sure”, after their talk, Steve’s worries were assuaged. Only a little bit.

Thankfully the next period was P.E. It’d probably be much more easier. Yes, easier with Billy by his side. What has the world come to.

Running around with unfamiliar body felt straight up weird. He didn’t lack muscles, but he certainly didn’t lift weights before, so all of his body was lean. He was faster and more agile, while Billy’s body was a solid tank. A simple bump while stealing ball from someone made them fall. No wonder at a simple shove Steve used to fall like a stack of dominos. Maybe he should take up on Billy’s advice on planting his legs when he’ll get his body back. *If* he’ll get his body back at all.

Billy seemed to already adapt to his body, using his speed to avoid Steve altogether, doing impressive three point shots. As if Steve would run into him and bruise himself on top of what he already had.

“See, even in your body, you can play ball and not be a little bitch”, Billy said while passing by. His voice sounded dumb, if he was honest with himself, lowered more than necessary.

“Shut up and play.”

They were so wrapped up in their game at the end, the coach had to shoo them off the court, since everyone else left. When they hit the showers, it was already empty, save for the people that were already finishing up, grabbing their bags on their way out.

“Guess we’re the only ones here”, Steve said out the obvious.

“No shit”, Billy carelessly threw off his garb, aiming at the general area of his locker.

“Use mine”, it’d probably be weird if they suddenly started to switch their lockers, “Don’t use up all of the cologne.” Hargrove always seemed to reek of his own cologne, probably to scare off other people in the area.

“Cover your junk, Billy”, he fruitlessly yelled after him, when the other boy just swaggered towards the showering area with little to no shame at all.

“Why? We both saw each other’s junk. Or you get turned on by lookin’ at yourself?” Billy grabbed his to emphasize his pointless point, giving him a grin, which didn’t work on Steve’s face at all.

Steve only groaned at that, heading at the other end of the room to wash up. Of course Billy wouldn’t give him a moment of peace, keeping on with his jabs and pestering.

“Knock it off, alright. I could do same shit in *your* body”, it’d probably be difficult to embarrass someone like Billy, but Steve could try, “And, fuck, stop making that face. Maybe it worked on your face, but it doesn’t on mine.”

“You liked my tongue action on my face?” he did it again, to which Steve only turned around in disgust, “You can’t even take punches – look at me; look at your face. Heard you got your face bashed in last year as well, and now you all chummy with the dude, who also

snatched away your bitch? You must be one hell of a masochist, bet you liked it when I punched your face in.”

“You know nothing about me!” rumble of his voice echoed around the room, slightly muted by the sound of running water.

“Oh, I know exactly who you are, Steve Harrington. Born with a silver spoon up his ass, king of the high school, your all life planned good and loaded, acting all tough and shit, when in reality your face just puffs up like a pufferfish after few punches. And then what, fell in love with a girl who doesn’t even want him anymore, now you think you know all the pain in the world?”

Billy’s venom filled voice has started to shake. Steve had no idea how the conversation escalated to this, but he was on it.

“Oh, what about you then? Thinking you’re some hot Cali shit, gracing us, in Hawkins with your presence. You think you’re the shit now? Think again, you’re just a bitter asshole, throwing punches at everyone who looks at you wrong, what, compensating for something? Mommy issues or is it daddy one? For you it seems like you got all iss-“, his sentence was cut off with a punch to his face. But instead of falling over like he’d have usually done, he stood his ground. He really didn’t want to damage his own face, so he threw a punch to Billy’s midsection, before he landed a kick to his groin.

Billy toppled over, clutching at his junk.

“Enough of fighting, Billy. If we’re stuck like this, at least we can act civil to each other and make our miserable lives a little bit easier. Got it?”

He got a grunt for reply, which was more than enough. Enough to consider whatever happening between them a truce. Feeling slightly better since all this mess started, he waltzed out of the shower area. He’ll just skip the rest of the classes and pick up Max later on. He was too exhausted for anything else for today.

3. Chapter 3

When Steve pulled up to pick up Max he almost forgot he was after Max, not his usual jovial boy. Calling out to Dustin by mistake, giving the poor boy second heart attack of the day. Sauntering off swiftly when he saw Billy pulling up.

“Can you stop acting so weird?” Max just grumbled, as she climbed into the backseat, throwing her skateboard before she slumped into the seat next to it.

“How I’m acting weird?”, he probably asked it too harsh, he noticed her jerk at his tone, “Sorry.”

She looked more baffled at his apology.

“Okay”, she just nodded, looking out the window instead, “Are you dying?”

How awful the relationship between Billy and Max got to be, when Steve can’t even apologize without making her suspicious. Well, he saw it first-handedly in Byer’s house how bad could it get, but Steve was in charge of the body now, he could fix that. Probably. He could try to make her life a little better, now that he got the chance at least.

“No, why?”

“You – apologizing. You never do. Thought you were making amends or something like that.”

“No, I’m not dying. Also, I’m trying to be nice here, no need to be a dickhead”, Steve huffed out, adding more speed.

“You were a dickhead first, Billy. I tried to be a decent sister, but no – you had to yell at me for nothing. It’s not my fault your dad hates you”, her voice trembled, Steve could see her pale face reddening, blending in with her hair. She was hurt, but also angry, the shakiness of her tone betraying her tough façade. He was already friendly as Steve with Max, no way he’d treat her the way Billy does to her.

It seemed like everyone wanted to discuss their problematic

relationships today. Steve sighed, sitting back into the leather seat, making it creak when the leather jacket rubbed against it.

“We could start again, you know. We moved here, no one knows us here.”

“Everyone already knows you’re an asshole. Besides *you* called this town a shithole, why the change of heart?”

“Well, let’s say I’m trying to change. For better”, they were close to their house, but a diner was also in their way, “Hey, how about I start doing so by treating you to some food. What do you say?”

Max only shrugged, but it was good enough for Steve to make a sharp U-turn, parking by the road.

When they walked in, a strong smell of fried goods and coffee packed their every sense. It was way past the lunch hour rush, so there were only few patrons scattered across the tables.

“What you want?” Steve was getting hold of Billy’s voice range. Slightly higher than he’d normally speak in his own voice for friendly faces, and perhaps, lower for special occasions.

“Waffles”, she plopped down at the farthest table, picking on a worn-out menu with yellow edges.

Steve walked up to the cashier, who was lazily popping her gum. She became more lively once she noticed Billy.

“Oh, a new face. What can I get you, sugar-pie?” she called Steve ‘sweet-plum’, at least she didn’t use same nicknames for everyone. The woman seemed to desperate, jumping at everyone like a predator. Or she was bored out of her mind, while she worked in a small town at diner. Go figure.

“Waffles n cheeseburger”, Max probably needed a drink, “And a milkshake.”

“Your order will be right up, sweet cheeks”, she winked at him, her glittery blue eyelid falling heavily, making her fake lashes flutter.

Steve might as well try out the infamous Billy charm on the waitress. He gave her a sultry smile at her, placing few coins on the counter, before he walked to his table.

“You don’t have to hump everything that moves”, Max looked up at him with a kid-like disgust, that’s induced by anything remotely sexual. Her freckled face scrunched up, “She looks *ancient*.”

At least Max seemed to open up more easier than her step-brother, easing into her seat, pulling out comic books out of her backpack.

“Too much charm, might as well share with the world”, he only got a snort for reply. They fell into comfortable silence, while they waited for their food.

The waitress came back, Steve noticed cheap perfume smell, that wasn’t there when he was ordering. She placed a cherry pie between them.

“On the house”, she gave a secretive wink to Billy, leaning down to show her saggy cleavage.

“Pie’s not the only thing I’d eat right now”, he fed on her ego. Max only threw a glare at them, before shaking colorful sprinklers on top of her waffles.

He must admit, Billy was rubbing off on him more than he thought he would. Steve would’ve probably never did so in his own body. Maybe he rid himself of any shame, maybe he was Billy deep down as well.

“It’s *good*”, Max wolfed down her meal, greedily slurping on the milkshake in-between the bites.

Steve only gave her a smile, before he dug into his burger as well.

After the diner, all Steve wanted to do was to fall into his bed and sleep away his built-up stress of the day. When they got home, their parents were already there.

Max greeted only her mother, before scurrying to her room. Steve having no idea how the family worked, just headed to his room, until

he heard the hard-looking man in the armchair snarled, “Finally, stopped dressin’ up like a faggot.”

At that moment, Steve felt such strong feeling of anger, he couldn’t help but retort back, “But you’re still an asshole.”

Next thing he knew, he was pressed against a wall, with a fist hovering right beside his cheekbone.

“What did you say right now”, seemed like no matter the answer, the blow would come. And Steve wasn’t known for being quiet and smart.

“I said you’re still an asshole”, Steve spat. And yes, the punch made him feel dizzy, but not that bad.

Laughing, he goaded on, “That all you got?”

The elder Hargrove’s face almost became purple from fury, veins popping up on his forehead.

“What, now you into beating. You maggot”, Steve managed to evade the next blow, punching the man right across his nose. There was a satisfying crunch of broken nose. He heard a roar, before he got tackled to the ground. Two hands snaked around his throat, pushing on and on. Steve tried to kick him off, but it was fruitless.

Distantly he heard a woman scream. Right before he passed out.

4. Chapter 4

Biting coldness was pressing against his cheek. When he moved, he felt whatever that was on his face fall down, its wrapping crunching from the impact. When the cold was gone, he could feel the dull throb of pain more acutely. Groaning, Steve dove in, feeling the floor for the blissful frozen pack of peas, or meat. Didn't matter.

Steve groaned, only to feel the parched throat of his. When he stood up, everything was woozy, blotches of bright light hurting his eyes more than it should. Screwing up his eyes against it, he looked around. Blurry figure made its way towards him.

"Mom pulled him off of you. He calmed down", Max handed him a glass of water, sitting at the edge of the sofa.

"Calmed down?" That asshole tried to kill me! Why didn't you call the cops?!" feeling of anger made blood rush to his head, which did not help his growing headache at all. Instead of shouting, he reduced his voice to hissing, sounding more like a snake than a human.

Max didn't reply at all, finding poking holes into one of the pillows much more interesting than answering her brother.

Steve cursed under his breath.

"I'll pick you up tomorrow for school", he stood up, feeling of nausea returning stronger.

"Where are you going?"

"Somewhere, where I won't get killed for nothing", he didn't want to be in this house anymore. There was a small dent at the wall where he was pinned. Small stains of blood on the carpet. He touched his face, wincing at the shooting pain from his cheek.

Boy, he wanted to barge into whatever room the asshole was in, and throw another punch at his face.

But before he could return and continue what was started with his 'father', he quickly went into Billy's room, stuffing into a duffel bag

whatever his eyes landed on first. He could be hot-headed at times, but he wasn't insane. He'll leave that for Billy.

When he thought about it, he could somehow feel bits of sympathy for Billy. Yes, he was still mad that the other boy kicked his ass in Byer's house. He didn't want to justify his actions. But still, no wonder Billy was fucked in the head. If he has it bashed in every week or so. Judging from the behavior Max and her mother, they were awfully calm about this, which only made Steve madder. It was usual occurrence. Nothing out of ordinary. Not even serious enough to call the cops. Nope.

He came back to himself only when he parked outside of his house. His parents were probably away. But he wouldn't risk it. He jogged up to his backyard, slowly opening the creaking gate. Yes, slow and quiet.

He turned around and let out a squeal he'd later deny ever making, when he saw himself by the edge of the pool, smoking. He should really decide whether to address the body or Billy.

"Aw, your face ain't that hideous to deserve that kind of reaction", Billy gave him a smile, throwing his cigarette sideways.

"Hey, don't do that", his parents would probably question the cigarette buds. If they found one. If they ever actually used the pool.

Billy didn't say anything about what happened in the showers, so guess it's all water under the bridge. Less to worry about.

"I see you got to know my pops. Charming, ain't he?" Billy glossed over his face once, looking towards the woods instead.

"How you settling in?" Steve wasn't in mood to talk about it. Billy probably felt the same.

"Quiet. It's quiet. Kinda different from what I'm used to."

"Tell me about it", Steve threw the bag at the nearby recliner, slumping down beside Billy.

They sat there for a while, howling of the wind whooshing over

them.

“Hey, we cool, right? I mean you beat me up, then I did you. Although it was my body.”

“Steve, you’re rambling. And, yes, we’re ‘cool’. I guess”, a shrug of nonchalance, “We tellin’ to people or what? Cos it’s getting annoying pretending to be you of all people.”

“Me? Oh, you think you’re the ‘Mr. Perfect’?” There goes the moment of peace they’ve had. Poof – gone.

But, yes. They had to tell someone. Steve could tell Dustin. Maybe explain to Max on Billy’s behalf. Telling Dustin seemed most logical, the boy was never known for holding secrets for long.

“Oh, we fightin’ again? Let me bring a beer then”, Billy stood up. Honestly, the sneer he usually bore didn’t suit Steve’s face at all. Steve cringed at the memory of himself pulling the tough guy act. Well, lesson learned.

“Okay, I’m sorry”, no need to continue the petty fight they both know no one’d win.

“Did the King Steve himself just admit defeat?”

“Billy, stop being a dick. We need to figure this out”, Steve pointed between themselves, “And I’m not going to freeze my ass off here any longer.”

Billy just closed his face in a wry approval, taking the bag from the chair on their way in. yet Steve could still feel the smugness coming off of him.

Steve passed by the hallway mirror, taking himself in. Hair was a sad limp mess, bruise on his face glowed brighter than any lighthouse. Great.

“One day in my body, and you made me look worse than a tweaker. Look – at least I tried”, Billy did a whole turn, and – yes, he looked much more like Steve. He didn’t have to rub that in.

“Well, your dad kept me busy”, a low blow, but he was tired.

“Okay, you suggested ‘figuring out’. How about we set ground rules, yeah? One-”, Billy leaned against the counter, showing his index finger, “You stop bitching around and be Billy. Two, you never mention my father, or anything related to me ever again.”

Steve made his way to the fridge, pulling out a milk carton, gulping straight from it, taking in all of Billy’s rules in. simple, yet Steve managed to fuck them up.

“Alright”, he gulped down painkillers he found in pantry with the milk. Which was gross, but he had to make do.

“Aren’t you gonna lay out yours as well?”

“I’ll think of it later. Now, I just need to sleep”, the thought of bed alone was heavenly.

That thought was cut short when they were both in the bedroom, both squinting at each other across the bed.

“I ain’t gonna sleep on the floor, if that’s what you’re implying”, as an emphasis, Billy jumped into the bed, hogging up all the blankets.

“Me neither”, Steve didn’t have an ounce of fucks left within him to care, so he flopped down beside Billy, tugging at the blanket in the process.

“Wait, the fuck you doing?”

“Trying to sleep. If you’ve got issues – be my guest on the floor.”

Billy would’ve probably moved himself to the floor, had not Steve mentioned it. Now, going down meant defeat, obviously he’d stay up on the bed, huffing and turning like an offended bull.

Before he knew it, Steve passed out.

5. Chapter 5

“So, you boys telling me you switched bodies”, Hopper looked like he could give negative zero shits about them, sipping from his coffee without a care in the world. Loud slurps were probably meant to fend them off.

In the morning, over a bowl of cereal, they decided to come clean with Hopper about their situation. Man went through hell and back with them. Well, with Steve and the gang. Billy was probably passed out in the living room of the Byers’ house the whole time, blissfully unaware of Steve’s annual horror festival.

“We’re not joking”, the chief only lifted his brow, movements still lazy and bored.

“And what do you want me to do ‘bout it? Arrest you two?”

Steve could feel Billy’s body tense up beside him immediately. This could get ugly fast.

“Billy, I need a word with the Chief. Alone”, he added, looking pointedly at the other boy. Billy huffed out ‘whatever’, before shutting the door behind them, leaving Steve and Hopper alone with the only sound of the fan above swishing above them.

“What if it’s related to Upside down?”

And there it was – a spark of rage in Hopper’s eye, grim shadow coming over his face.

“Go on”, Jim flipped his cig case out, popping out one fag.

“Well, it could be”, Steve shrugged, “I mean, think about it – all the dimensions coming together, why not add mind swap as well. The monster possessed Will for Christ’s sake! Are we next? Or are we that weak? To be possessed by each other?”

“You really Steve, huh?”

“You didn’t believe me?” Steve huffed out, pacing in front of the

desk, combing back his hair with his hand in frustration, “You think I’d prank?”

Hopper only looked at him, putting aside his cigarette to gulp down the rest of his drink.

“Okay, I *could*”, Steve continued, after thinking for a while, “But that’s not the point right now. We need to see Eleven.”

“Jane”, Jim corrected with a grunt, “And no, you won’t see her. She can’t be seen again for a while.”

“C’mon, Hopper. She was out at the winter dance! No one freaked out when they saw her”, Steve was really running out of ideas. But meeting up with El was probably the only solid idea he had since this started, so he latched onto it, refusing to let go no matter what.

“I’ll tell her”, Jim raised his hand when he saw that Steve was about to protest and start another rant, “And you will be grateful that I did so. I’m still endangering her, making her use her abilities. So, yes, I’ll pass the info. And now, please be kind and get out of my office, you already ruined my morning coffee.”

Steve had nothing else to do but to begrudgingly accept his fate and go out. At least he tried.

“Oh, and before you go. Don’t open your mouth, and keep your head down ‘bout this, ‘kay? We don’t need random Labs coming to Hawkins again”, Hopper added, before Steve could storm out of his office.

A little defeated, at the parking lot, he slammed the door of his car with more force than necessary, leaning his head against the wheel once inside. Had he been alone, he’d probably shout and scream, while kicking and punching the innocent car panel.

“We should tell your sister”, Steve said after his little meltdown. Billy, thank god, let him broil in his own misery, sitting patiently beside him, waiting until Steve breathed out, finally himself again. “Also Dustin.”

“You serious? Yeah, sure, let’s just run at them right now and tell ‘em

we switched bodies. I'm *sure* it'd go well", Billy started to fume.

"Well, what do you *want*? Pretend to be me all the time? I don't want to parade around like an asshole – that's for sure", all the fight led to nothing. But, damn, it felt satisfying to stab and twist his faults right into his face. And there was immunity of not getting his face bashed in, which was nice.

Billy pinched his lips, looking away, "Whatever."

Steve was surprised Billy gave up that fast. Hell, maybe he can be a whole different person by the time they switch back.

"Maybe I don't want to flaunt around being a creep who hangs out only with children and his ex as well", Billy suddenly said. Steve was already driving, his hands gripped the wheel harder.

"Fair point", Steve absolutely did not want to acknowledge his almost non-existent social life, but Billy didn't lash out at his previous jab, so Steve could be civil as well.

Billy turned on the radio, blasting the music all the way to their house.

"So, *Steve*", Dustin managed to croak out, after Steve had successfully managed to pin down the smaller boy. By the time he told the boy he's not who he looks like, Dustin pled for his life thrice, begging to reconsider his 'bright, bright life ahead of him' twice.

Steve helped the boy up, his clothes were gray from all the dust and dead leaves.

"Yup, me", Steve shrugged, shoving his hands into his pockets – trying to make himself look smaller, less menacing.

"Woah, that's so *cool*", Dustin poked Steve's abdomen before jerking back few inches, as if the older boy's going to disappear and all of this was a horrible prank coming from Billy.

"Okay, petting farm time's over", Steve irritably said, moving away

from the next finger edging towards him.

“Steve, you got to *experiment* with it!” Dustin whisper-screamed, almost shaking from excitement, “If we could just *simulate* what you two did, imagine the possibilities! Imagine me in Arnold Schwarzenegger’s body!”

“Okay, kid. No one’s going to experiment on anyone. Haven’t you learned anything from Hawkins lab?” It was a good idea, though. Steve filed away the thought for another day to ponder on.

“That was different”, Dustin mumbled.

“Oh yeah?”

“*Yeah*, yeah”, the banter with the boy made Steve feel better. It was almost the only normal thing that happened so far these days.

Dustin always seemed to bring out a brother’s nature out of Steve. Which was foreign and alien concept for both of them, being the only children in both of their households. Nevertheless, it was nice to have *someone* to be there for support and talk. Everyone in their circle had one: Mike had Nancy, Will had Jonathan, Lucas with Erica, hell, even Max – although a shitty one, everyone at school wouldn’t dare to mess with her, because of Billy.

Dustin pushed them both into his house, which was thankfully empty.

“So, it’s only you in there?” Dustin gestured with his hand towards his head, eyes sparkling with curiosity.

“Well, yeah. No memories. I just got his body”, Steve’s face scrunched up in worry, when he saw Henderson’s new kitten waddling towards them, reminding him of the grimmer theory about the mix-up, “And I think it *may* be related to the Upside down.”

Dustin’s face fell immediately, brows coming together into frown.

“We need to have a meeting with the others”, he declared, standing up, running towards his room.

Well, there goes all the secrecy.

6. Chapter 6

“Do you have-”, Mike looked up at Steve from under his brows, conspiratorially whispering the last part, “*Mental connection?*”

“For the last time – no. No connection, no nothing-“

“Double negative is positive”, Dustin butted in not so helpfully. Steve straightened him with a glare. Will tried to cover his snort into his curled fist with a cough, but attempt was futile.

“So, stop asking me all these repetitive questions”, Steve tiredly continued, grabbing one of the sodas on the tray, flopping down on the sofa in the corner.

They all gathered in Mike’s basement, but so far, they’ve come to nothing, all asking same questions from him. Max was least surprised one, huffing out, ‘Well, that explains the nice behavior’. He should probably tell Billy that kids know of their predicament, but, later. Way later, only when he asks.

“I could tell El, though”, Mike quipped up, jumping out of his chair, “She... Sometimes comes to me – like in a dream. We talk. Hopper doesn’t trust her with walkie-talkies, dude’s crazy ‘bout someone tapping in to listen in. But, our connection is there.”

“Hopper already promised to tell her. But, yeah, you could try as well. Better than nothing”, maybe she could be more prone to helping them, if two closest people to her would nudge her towards doing so. Steve knew it was being manipulative, but was it an everyday occurrence for people to switch bodies?

“Psh, ‘*You could try*’, c’mon have more faith, Steve. It’s not that bad, try to have fun with it”, Dustin defended his friend.

“Yeah, you’re acting as if someone murdered your grandma. You’re kinda being a party-poopers right now”, Max added to the snowball of a confrontation that was growing into a giant avalanche, “We get it, you’re worried that it might be related to Upside down, but you didn’t get any nightmares, right? Right?”

She asked again, looking unsure.

Then, surprisingly Will jumped into bandwagon as well, “I didn’t get any dreams as well. The Mind-flayer must be really weak. I don’t know, it’s kind of nice. I mean, your problem without any, you know, monsters.”

Steve could’ve opposed, but after Will’s input he couldn’t. Kid’s just been through too much already. He only sighed, sagging into the ratty couch more, wishing it devoured him whole.

Everyone’s eyes were on him, waiting for his answer.

“Alright. Fine”, kids perked up at that, “But. The hell you want from me? I’m just *lost* is all. I know you all care. Well, at least I hope I do. But what now? We have no leads, it came at us out of nowhere. I sure as hell don’t remember touching any *totems*, or wishing to swap.”

When he said it out loud it sounded much more hopeless. What was he supposed to do now, live as Billy? Forget his old life?

“Hey, boys, mom asked if you want-“, of course Nancy would walk into the room when Steve was in midst of a mental breakdown.

“Billy”, so much venom and hatred all in one word. Steve could see her tensing up, looking around the room for kids. Always the fusser, he almost smiled fondly, but it’d be too creepy for Billy to do that, so he calmed his features, trying to look as disarming as possible.

“Hey, Nance”, did he just say ‘Nance’? Well, he did. Oh, look, now she’s more pissed off.

“What are *you* doing here?” She hissed, slowly coming towards him, standing in front of Mike, who was watching over the whole fiasco with interest from his chair.

“I can explain”, Steve said. How would he do that? No idea.

“You better. Or else”, Nancy was a small girl, but she sure had presence of much bigger, dangerous one when she wanted to be, ever since all the shit they went through.

“He’s not Billy and we’re all here to help, please don’t tell anyone else”, Mike jumped in, gabbling the whole thing too fast.

“What?” she looked confusedly over at him, then at everyone else, noticing how everyone seem to be fine with ‘Billy’s’ presence.

“Ugh”, Dustin sighed in exaggeration, rolling his eyes at her confusion, “Steve’s Billy, and *Billy* is *Steve*.” He explained like she was five in his obnoxious way, like the times when they ask again about his science class projects.

“Steve?” Nancy looked over at him hesitantly, looking like a spooked animal now. All the extravaganza of bravery gone, shadow of concern draped over her face.

He hated that face, all concern. It reminded him of the days when they were together, but now Steve saw that being directed at Jonathan. Yes, it was still a sore subject for Steve. He lost his girl to *Jonathan*. By all means, Steve didn’t have personal issues with the other teen, but it still stung his eyes whenever he saw them together.

“Yup, that’s me”, should he stand up? He already been avoiding her for a while, and now, seeing her surrounded with all the witnesses of his downfall. Steve decided to keep sitting, letting Nance feel more at charge.

“Oh, Steve”, she started, taking in a breath.

“Nance, it’s okay, alright? We’ll figure it out. You should probably go back to your mother now”, Steve felt awkward and aggravated, wanting nothing but to bolt out of here. Coming to Wheeler’s house was a mistake after all.

It looked like she wanted to add more, but physically restrained herself, clenching her hand by her side, lips pinching in frustration. That’s all there was – frustration. Probably was for the best that Steve let go of her.

He looked after her with a feeling of a cold drenched sullen look, that kids noticed.

“Hey, it’s alright”, Dustin tried to comfort Steve, patting him on the

shoulder with inept motion, “You still have the best hair.”

At that, Steve let out a small laugh, finally cracking a smile. The gang eased up afterwards, discussing all the possibilities with more lively air. They probably tried to distract Steve from his earlier gloom.

“Care to explain why Max just barged into the house, threatening me to ‘behave right in Steve’s body?’” Billy slammed his hand on the table Steve was trying to finish the assignment on.

“Oh, does she need a ride home?” Steve bit into his pen, essays were really not his best points.

“What?” Billy spluttered, “That’s not the *point*! She knows! Who else does?!”

Not another outburst from Billy. Steve sighed. He had actually gotten used to it over the days. He figured out it was mostly all bark no bite. So far, surprisingly, Billy was actually manageable. No point in lying now.

“Well, Nancy does. The rest of the kids”, Steve turned to Billy, leaving the paper behind. Honestly, a fly would’ve distracted him from them.

“You thing they’ll keep their traps shut?! Next thing you know the whole fucking Hawkins will know, and what next? What next?!” Billy stomped to Steve’s face, jabbing his finger into Steve’s chest, pale mimic of the night Steve got his bashed in.

“They won’t, alright? Have a faith in them”, Steve tried. Probably a futile attempt, Billy seemed to have a patience of a one year old and a stubbornness of an old fart.

Hargrove seemed to contemplate it over, cursing under his breath turning around to pace around the room.

“Look, Max still here or not?” Steve was more worried about the girl now.

“No, she rode off with the others”, Billy sat down at the edge of the bed, making the mattress squeak in protest. He held his head in his hands, looking down the floor.

Steve could recognize a meltdown when he saw one, when he had one only few days ago in front of a public. Well, Steve could stretch out the olive branch first. He walked over to the other boy, crouching down beside him.

“You okay there?” Probably could’ve phrased it better. But, hey, better than nothing.

“What do you think, *dipshit*?” Billy’s breath came out faster, voice strained from rage and helplessness.

“That everything you got? Come on, stop being a dick. You’re having identity issues, believe me I get that. We’ve been avoiding each other for the past days, I think we need to have a talk”, Steve stood up, heading towards the library for his parents’ ‘hidden’ stash of booze. They needed one – at least Billy did. Talking about feelings? It was like pulling teeth with him, the very least Steve could do is to ease it with some alcohol.

They were already on second shot of tequila, sitting on the floor, leaning against the Steve’s bed, when Billy spoke out.

“It’s been quite a couple of days, huh? The calmest I’ve ever been and I had to be in body of someone else to do that. How pathetic that got to be?”

Steve kept quiet, waiting for him to continue.

“And your parents? Best fuckers. Didn’t even notice you were different. How fucking amazing, right?”

“It’s not that great”, Steve admitted. Some kids would’ve killed for parents like his, but Steve wanted none of that when he saw how Will’s mother practically dragged her son out of hell, when everyone thought of her insane.

“Better than mine”, Billy took a gulp straight from the bottle. Steve should probably stop him, he was usually lightweight with any

liquor. He doubted alcohol tolerance transferred along with his mind, as he was holding up with three shots of hard tequila just fine, only feeling warm at most.

“That’s for sure”, Billy didn’t need any coddling over his daddy, pity is the last thing he’d tolerate, “Your father’s a real piece of work I’ll say.”

“That pile of *shit*. Every fucking day, I wanted to just – kill him in his sleep, you know”, Billy started to slur, words dragging out slower, “Just knowing, him, *sleeping* in peace after leaving me half-dead. Who the fuck does that to their child? And that *Susan* just letting all happen, fucking acting like she knows what’s good for me.”

His voice grew more edgy, barely holding up not to waver. Billy looked down, toying with the edge of the bottle, probably hiding tears of fury.

Steve blamed the booze, but he had the urge to put his arms around Billy. A small comfort. He gave in halfway, putting only one arm over Billy shoulder. At that small gesture, Billy broke down, letting out a broken sob.

“Tell this to anyone and you’re dead, Harrington”, was all he muttered before passing out.

Steve wasn’t exactly in mood to move either, falling asleep as well.

7. Chapter 7

Steve woke up in tangle of limbs. Feeling disoriented and sore from sleeping on the floor, he grabbed the first thing that was on top of him, making Billy wake up.

“Fuck off”, was all Billy said before groaning from a headache. Steve always had hell of a hangover after few rounds of beer, never mind anything harder than that. Perks of being in Billy’s body was that he felt fantastic: not a single whiff of headache nor dryness in mouth that usually plagued him like a tick.

Steve tried to push him off, but decided against it, settling in. It was kind of nice to have someone close to him. God, had it really been that long? Guess he was that pathetic.

It was double pathetic, getting worked up over his own body? Now that’s fucked up right there. His hand was still on top of his thighs, Steve quickly retracted it, slinking away from the bed instead. He really needed to get laid already. But it wasn’t his body. Hold up, did Billy use his body? They needed to settle some more ground rules, it seems.

Steve staggered to his bathroom, heading straight to the shower. It was because of a warm body, is all, he reasoned on his way.

He was in a middle of a vigorous scrubbing to ignore his hardness, when Billy barged in, running to the toilet to throw up. At least that subsided Steve’s libido. A little bit.

“Man, I knew you were a pussy, but – fuck”, Billy wiped his mouth, flushing the toilet.

“There’s aspirin in the cabinet behind the mirror”, Steve didn’t even finish his sentence, before Billy scrambled to open the panel, swallowing pills dry.

“Move aside, Harrington”, Billy grumbled, before climbing in under the water as well, groaning in relief when the water hit him.

“Jesus, Hargrove, I was just finishing up. Can’t you wait a lil’ bit?” Suddenly the tub they stood in seemed too small for Steve, pressing one from the edges. “Fuck this”, Steve climbed out of it, grabbing a towel.

“Stop being a pussy, Harrington, not like I haven’t seen my boy every morning”, Billy gave a hearty laugh before reeling back into the water with regret at his loudness. Hell of a hangover, Steve deliberately shut the door loud enough just to torment him a little more.

Instead of idling around, Steve decided to drive to Hopper’s office. Enough days have passed on, yet there was no answer from Chief. Had he forgotten to pass on? Well, yell loud enough and you’ll be heard, right?

“It started to snow, huh?”

Tiny flecks of snow fell from the sky, lightly covering the parked cars outside. His breath was visible now, clouding away upwards. Maybe he should tell Billy to park inside from now on. Should’ve told him where he was going as well, but what’ll change anyway. Only questions and objections. Steve only needed some support in all this shit, of course he won’t get it anywhere. At least some people knew.

He pulled up at the parking lot. It was almost noon, Hopper should be in.

“Hey, hi”, Steve tried his best smile, “Can I, uh, see Chief Hopper?”

The lady at the desk only checked him up like some criminal on a run, mouth turning into a frown.

“Who’s asking?”

Well, wasn’t she a treasure.

“Ste-“, he quickly covered it with a cough, “Billy. Billy Hargrove.”

She didn’t look amused, waiting for him to continue.

“I’m here for the dead deer in our backyard”, not best of the lies, but

the effort counts.

“Billy!” Steve was ready to sag against the desk in relief, when he heard Hopper call his name, coming out of his office with gangly figure of a fellow police officer tailing after him, “Look, I got it why Mrs. Smith did that, but you can go now, I got it from now on.” Annoyance was clearly written all over his face, looking at the ceiling for salvation.

“But, chief, what if it’s more than that?” The taller man wouldn’t relent, pushing his glasses up, worry emanating from him.

Hopper only turned around to level him with a stare, until the man sighed and dragged his feet away towards his desk.

“This young man wanted to see you”, the old lady supplied, tone condescending. Unrightfully so.

“Yes, Flo. I, uh, wanted to see him about a vandalism case”, Steve wanted to cringe into himself.

“He said he wanted you to check out his dead deer in his backyard?” She was like a hound latching into a catch. Must be lonely in the police department.

“The... Deer was vandalized”, Steve lamely finished, that earned two unimpressed stares.

“I’ll be back in three”, Hopper only said, before trotting away, expecting Steve to follow.

When they were far enough, Hopper turned around, patting himself looking for a smoke.

“Did you tell her?”

“Hold your horses, not so loud”, he flicked one of the cigs into his mouth, furrowing his brows when the wind wouldn’t let him light up, “Okay, punk, you can’t just bust into the station whenever you please. You got that?” There was the look: waiting for confirmation, patiently.

"I got it. Look it's freezing out here. Can we at least talk in your car?" For a flashy guy, Billy sure did lack in winter garb. Steve tried to get everything the night he ran away, but he didn't see as much of a jacket though. Now, he wore one of the jackets he bought, but were a little big for him. Before.

"Hop in, it's unlocked", the SUV probably seen the better days, but it wasn't a bad car choice. And truth to be told, it suit the Chief just fine, "Listen, kid, I told Jane – so you can put off that sour look off your face. And yes, before you ask, she tried to do her *thing*, but she said she couldn't do much. Said it was too fast."

"Too fast?"

"I'm just saying what she said. I'm not getting that as well. Oh, and she didn't sense any other monsters with you, so maybe it's nothing to worry about after all", that explained his rather blasé attitude.

"Too fast. Too fast", Steve mumbled to himself, thinking over the words, "Maybe she can't pinpoint us 'cos we're too away? I mean I'm not exactly on friendly terms with Billy and we don't braid each other's hair all day."

Hopper only looked at Steve's hair, raising one brow.

"Yes, he told me which products to use. But that's not the point right now!" Steve all but quickly added, "We should try again. This week?"

"Sounds right", Hopper started the car, going in reverse, "We could. This Saturday noon sound right?"

"Yeah", Steve looked around in confusion, when the car took off towards the main road, "Hold up where're we going?"

"Hey, I'm helping out right now. You might as well help me out", he didn't say much, letting Steve douse in suspension.

Steve almost regretted asking for help from the Chief, when he got scratched by a cat third time. That made him wobble more on the lanky stairs the old lady provided with.

“Shit!” He tried to find balance, glaring holes into the hissing fur ball, that was equally unhappy to see him as he did, “Fuzz-fuck, come here.”

“What a foul mouth”, the small woman gasped with a scandalized face, “And for the last time: his name is Mister Fuzz-Fuzz!”

Hopper only gave a huff of laughter, sipping from a cup of tea the lady gave them earlier.

Steve, all patience gone, went for it, taking the cat by the scruff. It hissed and puffed up like train, trying to get to his forearms as much as possible. Halfway down, it got away from his hand, dropping down. Steve almost dove in, but he saw the cat landing on its feet, scurrying away into the house.

“Oh, Mister Fuzz-Fuzz!” She all but exclaimed, running after her little demon without a backwards glance.

“Sheesh, not even a “Thank you””, Steve carried the ladder to her front door, leaning it against the column.

“Well, that’s what you get for serving people. You gotta do what you gotta do without waiting for anything”, came a surprising reply from the older man, “Some take you as a great savior, other just expect more.”

“What do you do with people that want more though?”

“You get used to it. And you do what you can”, Steve rode the whole patrolling with the Chief. Helping out with trivial stuff. Anything felt better after the cat incident.

“Don’t you have classes”, Hopper finally asked at the end of it, parking beside Billy’s car.

“Would you sleep better if I say ‘no’?”

When Chief squinted his eyes, Steve continued, “No. Come on. Our winter break started.” Just before he entered his car he squeezed in a fast ‘Maybe’, before speeding away. Let the old man reconsider his morals. Ha.

When Steve got home, he found it empty and dark. Cautious, he checked all the rooms before feeling at peace, settling in the library, looking through the books they had. His mother was fond of spirituality, surely, she could have few on mind swap things. Or soul escapism. Or... Anything.

He was on fifth page of gurgle of nonsense, when he heard the door shutting. When he strained his ears to hear more, he got a giggle. Now that was weird. Are his parents back?

He cautiously slinked in the shadows towards the sounds, which were most likely coming from the living room, only to see Billy with a face full of breasts of a girl on top of him, who was all too happy, laughter bubbling out of her, while their bodies grinded and moved. It was their living room for Christ's sake!

He was still in the shadow of the hallway, looking at the wall and hoping they would at least go to Steve's bedroom. But no, the giggles turned into moans and rustle of clothes turned into all too familiar slaps.

"Oh, Steve! Thought you lost all the spark after your last break-up", Steve heard her not so quiet whisper. That made his blood boil, making him walk into the room. Sadly, his stomps were muted by the damn fluffy rugs.

The sight made him feel like a stranger towards his own body, when he saw the girl bouncing on top of *his* body, *his* hands on her bottom, squeezing. Steve felt all the blood rushing to his face and lower belly, body too tight for its own good.

"Well, I'm another man now", while Steve was busy ogling them like a caveman, Billy already noticed him, smug eyes looking at Steve, speeding up once their eyes locked, "A *better* one."

God what a cheesy line. But it seemed to work on her, all enthusiasm thrown into the world. Billy only made it worse, when he raised her bottom, showing all his glory sliding into her.

Join or get out.

Steve stepped forward, but backed away. He was *not* doing it with her. No. He willed himself away from them, shutting his eyes and ears, trying to wish away the image that plagued him until he passed away in his bed.

He deliberately ignored his hard-on.